

Message Text

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INFO AMCONSUL PONTA DELGADA

LAJES AFB

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E. O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: EAIR, PO

SUBJ: CIVIL AVIATION -- TWA DESIRE TO USE LAJES AIR BASE

REF: LISBON 1085

1. ECON COUNSELOR CALLED ON BRIGADEIRO ALBERTO BASTOS, DIRECTOR OF CIVIL AVIATION, AFTERNOON OF FEBRUARY 25 TO DISCUSS TWA REQUEST TO OPERATE AT LAJES AIRPORT. LATTER CONCEDED THAT, GIVEN BILATERAL AGREEMENT AND CHICAGO CONVENTION, TWA HAS JUSTIFIED LEGAL BASIS FOR REQUESTING RECIPROCAL RIGHTS TO UTILIZE LAJES. HE ADDED, HOWEVER, THAT GOP FACES PRACTICAL DILEMMA. GOP BELIEVES THAT IF IT STOPPED TAP OPERATIONS AT LAJES IN ORDER TO ELIMINATE BASIS FOR TWA REQUEST, NEGATIVE AZOREAN REACTION WOULD BE SHARP AND TROUBLESOME. IF, ON THE OTHER HAND, TWA WERE PERMITTED TO USE LAJES, GOP WOULD BE OBLIGED TO OPEN AIRPORT TO ANY NON-SCHEDULED CIVIL AIRCRAFT DESIRING TO MAKE TECHNICAL STOP. PORTUGUESE AIR FORCE, HE CLAIMED, OBJECTED FIRMLY TO LATTER ALTERNATIVE. TO CIRCUMSCRIBE THIS DILEMMA, GOP PLANNED TO HOLD TAP TO ITS PRESENT SCHEDULE OF ONE ROUND TRIP PER WEEK BETWEEN LAJES AND U.S. AND TO MAINTAIN LEGAL FICTION THAT LAJES IS SOLELY A MILITARY FACILITY. (TAP USED LAJES ALSO FOR TWO FLIGHTS PER WEEK FROM PORTUGAL TO CANADA AND FOR ONE FLIGHT PER WEEK FROM

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CANADA TO PORTUGAL.)

2. BASTOS INSISTED THAT CIVIL AVIATION AUTHORITIES INITIALLY AUTHORIZED TAP TO UTILIZE LAJES ONLY BECAUSE OF AZOREAN POLITICAL PRESSURES. THEY HAD NEVER CONSIDERED, MUCH LESS ACCEPTED, POSSIBILITY OF MAKING LAJES A CIVILIAN FACILITY. HAD SUCH A POSSIBILITY BEEN CONSIDERED IN THE PAST, HE STATED, ROUTE DESCRIPTIONS IN PORTUGAL'S BILATERAL CIVIL AIR AGREEMENT WOULD HAVE SPECIFIED SANTA MARIA AIRPORT RATHER THAN REFERRING SIMPLY TO THE AZORES. FOREIGN COUNTRIES HAVE THUS FAR UNDERSTOOD GOP'S DILEMMA AND HAVE, BY NOT INSISTING ON LAJES ACCESS FOR THEIR CIVILIAN CARRIERS, AVOIDED CREATING EMBARRASSING SITUATION FOR GOP. AIR FRANCE, HE NOTED WITH RELIEF, HAS APPARENTLY DECIDED TO USE SANTA MARIA RATHER THAN LAJES FOR ITS CONCORDE FLIGHTS TO/FROM VENEZUELA.

3. ECON COUNSELOR EMPHASIZED TWA'S DESIRE TO EXERCISE ITS LEGAL RIGHT TO OPERATE AT LAJES. RECENT COMPANY STUDY, HE NOTED, INDICATED THAT TWA SUFFERS CONSIDERABLE FINANCIAL LOSS BECAUSE OF ITS DISADVANTAGEOUS COMPETITIVE POSITION AND ITS LARGE PAYMENTS TO SATA, THE LOCAL INTER-ISLAND CARRIER. BRIGADEIRO BASTOS QUESTIONED ASSERTION OF A SERIOUS COMPETITIVE DISADVANTAGE, BUT ACKNOWLEDGED LOSS FROM PAYMENTS TO SATA. IN ANY CASE, HE CONCLUDED, GOP'S PRACTICAL DILEMMA PRECLUDED A CHANGE IN PRESENT ARRANGEMENTS.

4. COMMENT: BRIGADEIRO BASTOS AND HIS COLLEAGUES ARE CLEARLY OPPOSED TO FOREIGN CIVIL AIR OPERATIONS AT LAJES. DESIRE TO PROTECT TAP AND SATA INTERESTS PROBABLY HELP TO EXPLAIN THIS STAND, BUT SOME OPPOSITION LIKELY DOES EXIST TO TURNING LAJES INTO ADMITTEDLY CIVILIAN FACILITY. ECON COUNSELOR WILL PURSUE THIS ISSUE WITH TAP OFFICIALS, EMPHASIZING NEED FOR RECIPROCAL RIGHTS.
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